

The Mary Stewart Collect

Miss Mary Stewart wrote the Collect as a prayer for the day. It was adopted as a “Collect for Club Women.”

Although these sound like the petitions of a mature woman whose heart and mind had been mellowed by years of experience, they were written by Mary Stewart when she was only 28 years old.

As a young woman she was so caught up in her club work that she felt that women working together, with wide interests for large ends was a new thing under the sun and perhaps they had need for a special petition and meditation of their own.

The following is entitled “Reflections on the Mary Stewart Collect, and was prepared by the late Marie Salway, a Health Educator with Neepawa (Manitoba) Health Unit. It was provided to us by the Manitoba Women's Institutes and we express our gratitude to them for it.

Reflections on the Mary Stewart Collect

Keep us, O Lord from pettiness:

There are times were everyone contradicts everyone else. If she says they left at 9:15, he says “No, it was 9:20,” If he says they got to the corner of 4th and Main, she says, “No, it was 3rd and Main.

Who cares?

This can spill over into our club work. Everyone remembers and episode like the time we were divying up the chores for the upcoming dinner. Who would do what? “Well, the new member could cut the pies.” - “No she can't – two senior members always cut the pies” - “You can't be sure the new girl will do it right.”

The size of the person is directly related to the size of the thing that gets them most upset – enraged ...so...

Let us be large in thought, in word, in deed

We are the winners when we are large in thought and word and deed, because expectations are self-fulfilling prophecies, if we expect the worst, that's what we will get. A study of one hundred deprived youngsters in Boston revealed that 60% of them grew up to be a 'success' (no criminal records, paid their taxes, and didn't beat up their kids).

When they were asked why they attributed their success to, they said, “Somebody believed in me. Someone expected me to use my potential and energy in a positive way”

Someone had been large in thought and word and deed. Our thoughts, words and actions are a reflection of ourselves. Reflect that people are good, precious and beautiful and they will respond as good, precious and beautiful. You don't have to be lauding and praising – a sincere comment, your eyes and your hand clasp will let people know how you feel.

Dogs know how you feel about them and they respond by wagging their tail, or slinking away or biting you back. People, know too. Children are masters at detecting our thoughts and interpreting our words and deeds – and club members are pretty good at it too.

If schools opened at 7:00 am, some kids would be there not to warm their hands but to warm their hearts. Women look to each other for this warmth, too. So let us be large in thought and word and deed and --

Let us be done with fault finding

Complainers excite more contempt than pity. These are folks who, when they smell flowers, look around for a casket.

A psychologist from Brandon University came to help us with the session on “people relationships”. He started off by asking us what we wanted to talk about.

One lady said, “Don't ask us, you are the big professor from the University – you with your fancy suit and red tie – you are the big “Psychiatrist” -- you should be telling us what to talk about.”

We learned more about her than we did about the professor. “When Peter tells me about Paul, we learn more about Peter than about Paul”. Every time we speak we divulge more about ourselves than we do about our subject.

If you know someone well enough to find fault, we know them pretty well – well enough to have recognized some good quality.

So, let's dwell on that because “what we think on grows.” If we feed our minds on negative, mean, miserable thoughts, those 'weeds' grow. Think trusting, caring, positive thoughts and you'll never be lonely 'cause everyone will come by to see and smell the flowers.'

The wheel that squeaks the loudest gets the grease sometimes--- and sometimes it gets replaced.

And leave off self-seeking

Reverend Mutchmor, one time Moderator of the United Church of Canada told a story on himself to illustrate humility. One evening he went out to a meeting, and having arrived early, he dropped into a cafe for a cup of coffee to kill some time.

As he sat sipping his coffee, a lady approached and hesitantly said, “I think I should know you – aren't you the moderator of the United Church?” He was quite puffed up and secretly thought. “You see, I am recognized wherever I go – that's what it is to be in high places and move big things”

The lady, still hesitant, continued: “Well, excuse me, but you'll probably be going somewhere, where a lot of people will see you – so you might like to know that there's a hold in the seat of your pants”

With a great thud he said, he was back down to earth.

Self-seeking is a trap we all fall into. Somewhere we got the idea that fulfillment comes from self-centeredness and self-indulgence.

The Wages for Housewives Committee gave their 1979 Award of the Year to a lady, “Not because she was typical, but because she symbolized all the girls who had to choose between themselves and their children in order to find fulfillment” ...and she had chosen herself!

What hogwash! You will never find fulfillment by stacking yourself up against your kids or your husband or anyone else. You don't find happiness by standing on someone else's neck. But reach out to help another and the bluebird will come and sit on your window sill.

Self-fulfillment comes from self-discipline, self sacrifice and self restraint. Self indulgence is self-destructive to the individual and the organization.

To keep the marriage bubbling, with love in the loving cup.
When you're wrong admit it, and when you're right, shut up..

And that works in the Club, too.

May we put away all pretense...

My mother-in-law could never understand why anyone would dye their hair. She had looked forward to finding her first grey hair – then she lived in anticipation of the day she'd be snowy white.

People who are well-adjusted don't have to pretend. Another group who don't pretend are seasick. Anybody who wants to vomit doesn't put on airs!

Folks worth impressing are not swayed by pretense of power, prestige or pay. They are impressed by truth, beauty and goodness.

Unfortunately children who are so honest have to associate with adults who teach them to misrepresent. “Oh, that we could be born old, and grow younger and cleaner and ever simpler, until at last, with the white souls of little children, we lay us down to eternal slwwp.

When we misrepresent, we throw up barriers, blocking communication, loving, caring, and understanding. Sometimes we do it on purpose to keep people from getting too close.

“She drew a circle that shut me out. Rebel, heretic, thing to flout
But love and I had the will to win – We drew a circle and took her in.”

So the next time you see a phony – be kind, for they are frightened you won't be impressed – frightened you'll get so close you'll see right through their veneer. You 'draw a circle that takes her in". Give her a hug!

Let us put away all pretense and meet each other face to face without self pity and without prejudice.

“Prejudice is a vagrant opinion with no visible means of support.”

“Self-pity in a woman is as nauseating as cheap perfume”

There is a lesson in doing away with self pity and prejudice. A lady in our area had a double mastectomy. The first time I saw her after she was discharged from the hospital, I asked her how she managed the emotional trauma of the experience.

She said the health professionals were no help – the doctors and nurses couldn't talk to her or listen to her talk about this emotional crisis. They couldn't even tell her where to buy a bra – but a mutual friend who had had a mastectomy was a great source of strength.

Then she said, “Can you believe the great opportunity this has provided. We have no mastectomy counselling in our region. Because of this experience, I am in a good position to get that going and that's exactly what I am going to do.” And she did.

I thought of Peter Marshall (The Man Called Peter) praying in the U.S. Senate:

“O Lord, when we pray for life without trials and work without difficulty, help us to remember that oaks grow strong in contrary winds, and diamonds are made under pressure.

With stout hearts may we see in every calamity an opportunity, and not give way to the pessimism that sees calamity in every opportunity” Amen.

May we never be hasty in judgement and always generous

A true story in Reader's Digest told of an adopted child who grew to womanhood bitter and resentful of the parents who had rejected her. Although she had a good home with loving adoptive parents, she vowed she would find her natural parents and tell them of her wounds.

When she finally located her mother, she found she was blind. She also learned that because her father had died, her mother felt there were too many obstacles in providing this wonderful baby with life's opportunities. Her loving concern prompted her to make the painful decision to let the baby go to a family that was better able to nurture her.

Never be hasty in Judgement and always generous.

Generosity is loving people more than they deserve. It's loving the unlovable. Anyone can love the lovable – even the mean and stingy.

Everyone needs the nourishment of a smile, a touch, a word of encouragement. The greatest nourishment comes in small everyday acts of tenderness – not in the huge celebrations. And each of us can give this nourishment. We owe it to each other.

So give until it hurts – then keep on giving until it's a joy.

Ernie Pyle said when his mother suffered a stroke, the neighbour, Anna Kearns, phoned. She didn't say “Let me know if there's anything I can do.” She said, “I'll be over at 7:30 in the morning to do the wash” - and she was.

“And must I be giving again and again?”

“O, no said the angel, piercing me through

“Just give till the Master stops giving to you.”

But let's not forget that giving can't happen without receiving. It is very hard for some

people to accept graciously. (They are only comfortable when giving.) When you receive, you make a gift to the one who gives – because you have let them know the joy of being generous. To be gracious in receiving takes practice –it's worth learning.

Teach us to put into action our better impulses – straight forward and unafraid

Children are full of wonder and delightful abandon enjoy the innocent freedom to take a chance. Adults have to consider, explore endless possibilities, wait till it's absolutely safe, end up doing nothing. But not a group of women in our district who decided to do something about accident rates. Representatives of three groups came together and decided on numerous projects. Cautioned that they should start small, concentrate in a narrow area, achieve and build on that success – they said “Nonsense... it's a big job and there's lots of us and lots more we can involve. “They surged forward... got the Elks to teach bicycle safety, got stores to put poison control charts in grocery hampers, old slow moving vehicle signs for Mother's Day, Father's Day and birthday presents, got school buses loading on school grounds (but only after they had got the grounds paved and back gate on the property) and many, many more.

When you feel that higher power egging you on, step out with faith and trust... straight forward and unafraid.

Let us take time for all things.

The best part of our lives is the time spent in little unremembered acts of kindness, tenderness and love. We are in such a rush today, it's easy to miss the chances to reach out and help.

Jean Vanier said that the smile of the poor in response to help is what sends energy flowing through your veins... so Jean Vanier and Mother Teresa were lucky – they were with the poor – they could be transformed and rejuvenated by a smile of the poor.

But Mother Teresa said the greatest poverty is to be rejected, unwanted, unloved and North America experiences that kind of poverty more than any their continent.

Our mission field is where we are. One mission field is no more important than another. We pass this way but once – some people we meet will only know God through us. So let's not hurry to a higher level of service, picking our way past the lonely, isolated, starving, unloved and unwanted ones. Let's not pass by the other side.

Make us grow calm, serene, gentle

A friend, Judy says she always chuckled inside at this line of the Mary Stewart's

Collect, ...because when it came up she was still out of breath, huffing, panting, exhausted from having wrestled the four kids through the evening meal and into their beds. Having hustled herself through the bath and dressing, now she was asking ..Make me grow calm, serene, gentle.”

They say we flare up when our feelings of personal worth are threatened ..when we are 'put down" or think we were "put down”.

Onetime my husband said , “We're out of margarine.” I said “Well, that's fine with me. I've carried every roll of toilet paper and every pound of margarine into this house for the last thirty years – and if you think you can manage this household better than I can – go right ahead – you an start right now don't wait until Monday!”

He never said I couldn't manage the house – he just said, “We're out of margarine/”

When someone gives you a rough time it's easiest to return the insult. But he is already having a tough day – no sense to make his problem worse or to make it yours. Tell him how wonderful his garden is – or how it is great that his child won the rose bowl.

A gentle answer turneth away wrath.

Grant that we may realize that it is the little things that create differences; that in the big things of life we are one.

It can be unsettling if you bring your odd cups and saucers to the spring fling and some 'busy body' sets them out without matching the right cup to the right saucer. And which is best – a potluck dinner or a catered affair/ bread and cheese, or cake and cookies.

One hundred years from now it won't matter. What will matter is whether we worked together for the common good. There is no competition in the group. If someone excels, everyone rejoices – if someone stumbles and we all do), we all suffer the pain, but we hang in and see them through.

You wonder why they talk about “silly geese”. Wild geese know enough to work together. Because they share leadership and fly in formation (creating a wind tunnel) they can fly 70% farther. Any silly goose knows we do better when we hang together.

May we strive to touch and know the great human heart, common to us all, and O Lord God, let us not forget to be kind.

Our problem is not a problem of the head, it is a problem of the heart. It is not an

academic question – it is a question of love.

Our rates of vandalism, murder, violence, child abuse, suicide and social disruption of all kinds are skyrocketing. We are emotionally malnourished...there is a shortage of love. We need more people who care.

We have to impress on people everywhere that happiness is in loving and being loved (and we do that best by our example). To love is to do ordinary things with kindness and tenderness.

It's the wife nursing the terminally ill husband at home. It's Ken Taylor getting Americans out of Iran. It's the gentle taxi driver helping an old lady with her shopping bags. It's the babysitter who does the dishes and the countless volunteers who work for scouts and guides, hospitals and libraries, meals on wheels and Sunday school.

This is the language the deaf can hear and the blind can read. It restores faith and makes people walk tall. It reminds us that God is walking in our midst.

It is why women's organizations around the world work together in service to their communities. It is why women's organizations around the world take as their creed The Mary Stewart Collect.

The spirit of this little lady is with us still as we pray together, "O Lord God, let us not forget to be kind."